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Eminem Album Preview: 'Relapse' Is Scary, Funny And Personal

On his first album in almost five years, the rapper reflects on his darkest period, but the jokester still comes out.

By Shaheem Reid

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No surprise, [article id="1610182"]Eminem's *Relapse* album[/article] leaked online early (and is now streaming on his MySpace page). He's seen it before, even having to bump album-release dates up to a Friday instead of a Tuesday in an effort to not lose sales.

Relapse -- due Tuesday, alongside DJ Drama's second *Gangsta Grillz* LP and Busta Rhymes' *Back on My B.S.* -- is projected to come out on top -- and some say it could stay there for up to three weeks. It's an [artist id="502642"]Eminem[/artist] album in every sense. No other rap superstar could make a record like this, in which he cries that he needs therapy and outright scares some folks.

Just look at some of the first singles. On [article id="1610369"]"3 A.M.,"[/article] he talks about channel-surfing in between a murder spree and relaxing while watching Miley Cyrus, lotion in hand.

Slim Shady will amaze fans by making them bob their heads while listening to the most uncomfortable of narratives, like his accounts of being molested as a child by his stepdad and his mother feeding him "paint thinner" and more drugs than you can find at Walgreens. "I was born with a di-- in my brain, yeah f---ed in the head/ My stepdad said I sucked in the bed," he raps on "Insane." And that's just how the record starts. The second verse is masterfully woven with a choppy, old-school flow over the psychopathic G-funk of Dr. Dre. Em raps from the perspective of his stepfather talking to his mom about young Marshall's superhuman feats: "He took the chainsaw, bit the f---ing blades off/ ... Took his eye out, picked it up and played pingpong."

"My Mom" is another in a long line of unflattering records about Em's mother. Shady raps in such a whimsical way that you don't know where the truth ends and poetic license begins. "My mom loved Valium and lots of drugs," he sings on the chorus. "That's why I am how I am/ 'Cause I'm like her."

On the skit "Dr. West," Em's doc from the [article id="1609889"]fictional rehab center Popsomp Hills[/article] encourages the use of drugs. And on "Bagpipes From Baghdad," [article id="1611007"]Em threatens Nick Cannon[/article] because he wants to rekindle a romance with the actor's wife of just over a year, Mariah Carey. "Nick Cannon better back the f--- up," Mathers raps over a beat he labels "Egyptian" and "funk." "I'm not playing, I want her back, you punk."

The album isn't all gags, though. On "Déjà Vu," Em recounts his descent into drug dependency. Over a sparse track, he raps about slowly spiraling out of control to the point where his daughter becomes scared of her father's behavior. The song opens with the sound of an ambulance siren blaring and a paramedic reporting a possible overdose of a man that fits the description of Marshall Mathers. "I seem to gravitate to the bottle of NyQuil, then I salivate," Em raps on the first verse. "Start off with the NyQuil, like, 'I think I'll just have a taste'/ Couple of sips of that, then I gradually graduate/ To the harder prescript drug called Valium, like, 'Yeah, that's great.' "

Eminem rhymes that coping with [article id="1528386"]Proof's death[/article] was one of the factors that led to the dark period in his life over the past four years, mentioning the D12 member by his birth name, DeShaun, in the song. The chorus then speaks to Em's ongoing battle with addiction: "Sometimes I feel so alone, I just don't know/ It feels like I've gone down this road before."

The outpouring of emotion continues on [article id="1611174"]"Beautiful,"[/article] a six-minute opus and the only song Eminem produced on *Relapse.* He speaks about depression and losing his motivation to rap. The song is an earnest account of what his life could have become if he walked away from the mic. In [article id="1610557"]his recent *Vibe* interview[/article], Em said "Beautiful" was the only song he recorded before his sobriety that was good enough for him to put on this project.

The album ends with a lyrical fury on "Underground," a throwback to the early days of Slim Shady, before Em's alter ego was a celebrity-bashing pop icon. Eminem raps some of his most outlandish, rewind-worthy lines on the track since *The Marshall Mathers LP.* "Straightjacket with 108 brackets/ And a strap that wraps twice around my back, then they latch it," Em spits. "Cut your f---in' head off and ask where you headed off to?/ Get it? Headed off to?"

In the *Relapse* liner notes, Em shouts out his fallen friend Proof.

"Proof, no matter how much time passes, not a day goes by that I don't think of you," he wrote. "If it weren't for you, I would not be where I am today, and we both know it. I tried to write a song for you, but nothing was good enough, so I'm dedicating them all to you -- and you'd be happy to know that I spazzed out on 'em again! I know you wouldn't have it any other way! F--- 'em all -- let's get 'em!"

Shady is definitely back.